

Memoir of Martin F. Klik

“Old Man Klik’s True Life”

I lived on the west end of Syracuse all my life. The streets I lived on were Richmond Ave., Emerson Ave., Willis Ave., and Brewster St., which is now called Erie Blvd West. On Brewster St., I lived in a 3 story house, which is now the Adelphi Club. I lived on the 3rd floor. During winter, we had poor heating. No furnace. We had a cast iron cooking stove which had to heat all the rooms. Our toilet was in the unheated hallway. It was just like an outdoor toilet. Cold! Very cold! We lived there during Prohibition Days. There was a saloon on the first floor run by Martin Szkotak. This place was raided by the G-men many times. Szkotak was always tipped off when the raids were coming, so he always had the bootleggers bring up 5 gallon tin cans of Canadian whiskey to our apartment on the 3rd floor. There were more than 10 tin cans set up in our closet and covered up. The G-men never searched our apartment. Being a kid about 9 or 10 years old, I did a lot of favors for Szkotak and his bootleggers. I used to run errands for them, such as going to the grocery store for them. They always gave me a quarter. I collected many quarters from them. I still remember some of the bootleggers’ names: Szotak, McCarthy, Cirry, Frederick, Bagozzi, Kane and a few others I don’t remember. They used to bring the whiskey from Canada through Lake Ontario. Once the G-men caught them on the water on Lake Ontario and Kane lost his life during the skirmish. I had my mind set on being a bootlegger when I grew up. But Prohibition was repealed years later. Szkotak died of cancer. Shortly after his death, Mrs. Szkotak sold the building to the Adelphi Club and we were lucky to find an apartment on the corner of Willis and Erie Blvd. West.

I attended Gere School, Porter School and Sacred Heart School. I believe I started Sacred Heart School at the 5th grade. The reason was because I had to take catechism and Catholic religion subjects in order to make my First Communion. I graduated 8th grade grammar school at Sacred Heart School. I planned on continuing my education at Central High School and with any luck, a college education. All my education plans were stopped when my stepfather developed a bad case of rheumatism in his hands. He was forced to retire from the Eckel-Nye Steel Co. There were no such things as pensions, unemployment insurance or any other benefits in those days and with 5 children and a wife to support, money stopped coming in. Welfare would not help us, claiming my stepfather could work.

It was up to me to help out in some way. So instead of attending Central High School, I was forced to attend continuation school. This school was mainly for students who were too young to drop out of school. In those days, the law forbid underage students to drop out of school. I think I was forced to attend this school 3 times a week. The rest of the week, I had to look for work. My sisters were still going to school, so there was no help from them. I was a young, skinny kid and factories did not want to take a chance on hiring me.

Meanwhile, my stepfather had an old Polish doctor taking care of him. In my opinion, he was more or less a “quack”. He had my father buy blood sucking leeches who would

suck out his bad blood. He would cut his hands and put them in a shoebox with leeches who would suck out his blood. The doctor claimed the leeches would suck out the bad blood and cure his hands. There were times when his hands were so shaky, he had me cut his hands until they would bleed. The leeches had a nice meal. I hated the entire operation. (By the way, my real father died when I was 2 or 3 years old).

Before I continue with my life, I want to write about an experience I had living on Brewster St. I was between 10 or 12 years old. I shall never forget it. Sometime after midnight, I woke up in a pitch dark bedroom. As I opened my eyes, I saw a brightly lit white figure kneeling over me. The figure wore bright white clothing similar to what some nuns wear. The figure had its elbows on my bed and its head bowed. I couldn't see its face. I heard the figure whispering as in praying and a shiny rosary was swinging back and forth in her hands. I completely froze and I tried to scream out to my sleeping family but I was in state of disbelief and shock. I could not move. Every time I closed my eyes and opened them, hoping it wouldn't be there, but it was still there. I don't know how long this lasted but finally my stepfather got up around 5 am to get ready for work. When he turned the lights on in the kitchen, the figure vanished. My room was near the kitchen. Then I screamed and woke up my sleeping family. I told them all about a figure in shiny white, kneeling by my bed praying and a shiny rosary swaying back and forth. My parents told me it was just a nightmare. I didn't believe them and to this day, I still believe I saw this figure. I've had nightmares many times and very shortly they were all forgotten. Why does this still stick in my mind?

Now back to my earlier story. I left off where my father had a bad case of rheumatism. I think my stepfather really ruined his hands and it's a wonder he didn't get blood poisoning from the leeches. He was forced to quit his job. I had nobody to help me find a job. I was a scared kid on my own. Finally a friend told me about the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps). I tried to sign up but at that time, they were filled up and not accepting new members. Also, they said at the present time, they were only taking 20 year olds. I was too young. I didn't know what to do next. I honestly was thinking of trying to be a burglar. Finally a school friend told me to talk to City Alderman John Giminski. By appointment, I went to see him. I was a very scared kid. He noticed my fright and he tried to settle me down by giving me a soda and a donut. He took all my statistics, etc. and the very next day, he personally went to the CCC office to try to get me in. With his help and being a politician, I was finally accepted. They juggled my age and the year and made room for me. It took a politician to get results.

The next day, an Army truck picked me up at the house. My sisters and mother were crying which made it worse for me. They drove me to Sheds, NY, CCC camp, where I enlisted. I spent about 2 years at this camp. I received \$30 a month. They sent \$25 to my mother and I got \$5. Twenty-five dollars a month was a big help to my family in those days. I tried to get home about every second weekend. About every 2 or 3 weeks, an Army truck (2 trucks) would drive the boys on pass to Syracuse. The trucks would leave about 10 am and drop off the boys at the old Syracuse Post Office on Erie Blvd. At 11 pm sharp, the trucks would take the boys back to camp. Many boys missed the trucks and were AWOL. I would always stay home until Sunday evening. My pass was

good until Monday, 12 am midnight. Sometimes Sam Sgarlata would drive me back to camp. As you know, the highway between Manlius and Cazenovia is very hilly. Sam had a Model A Ford. Many times the Ford would get halfway up the hill and stop. There was always 4 people in the car and I guess the weight was too much. Sam used to turn the car around and drive up the hill with the car backwards. On hills, the Fords had more power in reverse.

One Saturday in December, I got a weekend pass to Syracuse. No trucks were leaving for Syracuse because of the bad weather forecast. So I had to hitchhike to Syracuse with another Syracusan, John Hughes. I really don't remember his first name, it might have been Charles. Sheds to Syracuse is about 30 miles. We hitched a ride to Cazenovia and the weather got bad. It was snow mixed with freezing rain and some sleet. We were ready to go back to Sheds but decided to go on to Syracuse, hoping to catch a ride. Because of the weather, no cars were in sight. Only one car went by us, but he wouldn't stop. After a few minutes hitchhiking on a corner in Cazenovia, we decided to walk, thinking we may catch a ride. No luck. We walked all the way to Syracuse. It took us about 10 hours to get to Syracuse. When I finally got home, it was around 9:00 pm. My family were shocked to see me in such a condition. I was an ice-man. My clothes were very stiff (frozen stiff) and I was very cold. Seeing my mother crying made me feel awful. I changed into dry clothes in a hurry and my parents loaded me up with hot coffee. I was very sick the rest of the night and the next morning, I couldn't get up. My sister Stella called the CCC office to inform them I wouldn't be in camp Sunday night because of my sickness. 3 hours later, an Army ambulance pulled up at the house and an Army doctor took charge. He said I had a bad case of flu and a good chance of developing pneumonia. The doctor gave me a couple of shots, one on each arm, and gave me many pills which I had to take daily. I heard him tell my sister Stella that I was in a serious condition. The doctor said that if I got any worse by tomorrow that it will be the hospital for me. He came the next morning and said I was holding steady. My parents were blaming themselves for allowing me to join the CCC. The doctor came 6 days in a row to treat me and ordered me to stay home at least 2 weeks. Seeing an Army ambulance parked at the house stirred up the neighborhood. Many of them tried to help. They were very helpful.

After 16 days at home, the doctor OK'd my return to camp. The next day he personally picked me up in the ambulance to take me back to camp. He was such a nice man in his 40's. On the way, we stopped at a coffee shop in Manlius. He bought us donuts and coffee with the government paying the bill. On the way to camp, he told me I was in very bad shape with a good chance of dying.

In the summertime, we planted trees, built dams and roadways and knocked down some trees. In the winter, it was the same except for planting trees which was out of season. Winters are very cold at Sheds. I was lucky in winter because I was picked to be a surveyor's helper. I think the Army doctor had something to do with my new job. We surveyed mostly farmlands and future roadways, etc. What was really puzzling was that Charles Hughes never caught a cold, not even a sniffle.

I served the CCC for about 2 years or more. Things were getting tough at home. Welfare would not help. Then my stepfather went to Eckel-Nye Steel Co. on Emerson Ave., begging to give me a job. The Steel Co. finally agreed to put me on probation. The CCC gave me an honorable discharge after I proved I had a job. I started as a loader at the steel mill. I loaded mostly box cars. I worked my way up and the boss, Jake Eckel, called me in the office one day. I was scared. I thought he was going to fire me. He told me he was very pleased with my work and predicted good things for me at the plant. He said they were very surprised by my work. They thought I wouldn't last a week because I looked kind of skinny and weak. I fooled them all. I may have been skinny but I lifted 100 lb. steel bars with ease. I was promoted to making fence-posts and painting them green. I also got a small raise which helped a lot. My weekly pay I gave to my mother. I just kept a couple of dollars for myself. I could see the change in my family. Things were a lot better. We ate better. My sister, Stella, also helped. She got a job house cleaning and that money helped. I worked on the shears which cut all types of steel into many sizes. I was doing very good at the steel mill. I had a good chance for another promotion.

*The bottom dropped out when World War II caught up with me. I had to register for the draft. On May 13, 1942, my number came up for the draft. I didn't want to go and I tried to avoid Army service. A few years previous, I broke my left arm in two places playing baseball. I told the Army doctors my arm still bothered me. I didn't lie because it was the truth. They said I still had my good right arm so they OK'd me. One Sunday morning an Army truck stopped at the house and drove me and others in the truck to a reception center at the Armory Square building. They didn't even give us a chance to say good-bye to our families.

Before I forget, there was a girl by the name of Lena Davia. She was always chasing after me. I just didn't go for her. When we were kids, she always fought my battles, and protected me. I didn't like that. My sisters always tried to push me to date her. Lena Davia will appear again later in my story.

To continue my story at the Armory Square, all the young men, including myself, were put through a physical examination. Many failed and were sent home with a 4F rating-meaning unfit for military duty. Soon after the physical tests, we were sworn in as soldiers. An Army truck were waiting for us to drive us to our camps. As we were leaving, another bunch was going in to be given physical examinations. They didn't even give us a chance to see our families or get some spare clothing from home. They said we would get all the clothing we needed from the US Army. They crammed 10 to 15 men into each truck. After the trucks were loaded, (about 10-15 trucks), we left as an Army truck convoy. We didn't know where we were going.

After hours of rough riding and very hungry, we finally reached our destination - Fort Niagara at Niagara Falls, NY. They marched us to the mess hall and fed us. We had pork chops, mashed potatoes, vegetables, dessert and coffee. Then they marched us to our barracks. They were 3 story buildings loaded with soldiers. All the sleeping bunks were doubles - upper and lower. I was awarded one of the uppers which was about 6

feet off the floor. I always kept thinking of rolling over down on my head. Many men did fall off and were injured. The beds had no side guards. At the camp, we took light Army training - such as learning which was our left foot and which was our right foot during drills and how to make up our beds, Army style. I had no trouble because most of this I learned at CCC camp at Sheds, NY. We also had a lot of lectures on Army life, Army regulations, etc. We also had to take an IQ test. Every day, many soldiers were shipped out and many men took their place. After about 3 weeks, my number was picked, with about another hundred or so men. We were told we would take our basic Army training (boot camp) at Fort Francis, Warren, Wyoming which was about 3 miles from the city of Cheyenne. They trucked us to a train depot where a troop train was waiting for us. The train also had sleeping cars with upper and lower decks. We also had an Army kitchen car or two and a large dining room which were 2 passenger cars. We were fed 3 times a day. The food was not good. It took us almost 2 weeks to get to Fort Francis. It was a slow moving troop train. We made many stops, about every 3 hours, to stretch our legs outdoors and do some exercises. After about an hour, we were herded like cattle back inside. Finally, after a long miserable ride, we arrived at Fort Warren. They dropped us off right at the Fort. They had Army officers greeting us and separating us. I was put in a certain group of about 40 men and we were marched to our barracks. The barracks were very nice and there was a nice mess hall. We slept in single cots.

After one day of rest, we were assembled in a large meeting hall. There were many men in the hall. They told us we were picked for officer training. I was shocked. I didn't want to be an officer. I didn't want to be bossing other men. They told us they picked us because of our IQ test we took at Fort Niagara. We all had fairly high scores. After this meeting, I went to see the officer in charge of this school. He was a major. I told him I didn't want to be an officer. He told me I had no choice. I said I never finished high school. I just graduated from grammar school and had just about 6 months of junior high. He said during peace time, I would be rejected, but this is war time and the Army made many exceptions. After a few minutes of talking, he kind of sided with me. He said he had the power to reject me if I was not happy. I thanked him for my release. He had to assign me to another outfit. Next morning, a sergeant came for me. He helped me pack my duffel bag and drove me to another part of the Fort. This part of the Fort reminded me of a tent city. It had hundreds of tents in the area. Many rows and Army tents which had 6 or 7 men to a tent. We slept on cots. The nights were cool and we had a coal stove in the center of the tent to keep us warm. Living in a tent was a big let down from living in the officers' barracks.

But, I was happy, I took my basic training there, how to use a rifle, and automatic hand guns. We were put through obstacle courses every day and took target practices with rifles and pistols. I did get a Marksman's Badge, an award for good shooting. In my travels, I lost the badge. We trained for about 2 or 3 months. We had weekend passes to the city of Cheyenne which was 3 miles away. They gave us transportation to the city but we were on our own getting back to camp. Some nights we couldn't get a ride so we had to walk back to camp. I was lucky enough to be there during "Cheyenne Days". Many citizens were dressed up in cowboy outfits. At business places, the people wore cowboy outfits. Drugstores and other stores, movie houses, eating places and

everywhere, all wore cowboy clothes. They also had big rodeos during a few days of celebration. I don't know how many days the "Cheyenne Days" lasted. You couldn't predict the weather. We went to Cheyenne in our shirt sleeves. I went to the movies one afternoon. The day was hot and muggy. This was June 13. When I left the theater, it was cold and snowing. The snow was coming from the nearby mountains. I remember the first time I went to town, I saw some soldiers carrying jackets. I thought it was odd to see them carrying jackets on a hot day. After that day of snow, I always brought along a jacket. Many soldiers were sent to other camps, because they couldn't take the high altitude. They just couldn't get used to it. They had nose bleeding and they had breathing problems.

After our basic training was completed, the soldiers were separated and sent to permanent Army camps. In my case, my IQ test again decided where I went. They sent me with 37 others to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri - **US Army, 6th Infantry, ("Sight Seeing Sixth") Sixth Quartermaster Corps/2nd QMC Red Star Division Battalion, HQ Company, G Company**. In the QM, they wanted people with smarts such as good sense and lots of arithmetic knowledge. At Fort Leonard Wood, we took combat training and spent a lot of time on obstacle courses and rifle ranges. In September of 1942, the entire 6th Infantry Red Star Division headed for Tennessee maneuvers. One full week of truck convoys hit the highways for Tennessee, carrying men, ammunition, tanks, mobile kitchens, and Army equipment. We tied up civilian traffic but we had right of way. We had soldiers posted on my spots directing the convoy. I had a spot in Nashville directing them to a left turn. I spent seven hours doing this before I was relieved. It wasn't a steady stream of trucks coming through. About every half hour or an hour, a convoy of many trucks came through and I had to be ready to direct them. Civilian traffic was at a standstill until we got through.

We were on Tennessee maneuvers from September to November. The maneuvers were very tough, very tough. Many casualties. The 6th Infantry Quartermaster Red Star outfit took a farmer's farm land and moved in to stay on his land. The farmer didn't like it but it was wartime and the military came first. We lived in pup tents. Each soldier had his own pup tent, room enough to sleep and a few items such as an rifle, etc. When it rained, it was a mud hole.

One day while we were on maneuvers, the angry farmer released all his cattle and sheep on our area. The cattle and sheep wrecked our entire camp. All the pup tents were destroyed. The entire area stunk like an outhouse. We had to move to another area with new pup tents. We heard the farmer was arrested and got some jail time. The entire division met with some resistance from the civilians. Sure, it was tough on them but it was also tough on us. Most of the civilians were nice and understanding. I was invited a few times for weekend dinners. Many other soldiers had dinner invitations. The dinners I had were all delicious - southern style cooking. On November 5th, the entire 6th Infantry Division started a truck convoy back to Fort Leonard Wood. It took at least a week to move back to the Fort. The same convoys, the same traffic, etc. It was good to get back to Fort Leonard Wood.

We didn't stay very long at the Fort. On November 25, the entire 6th Red Star Infantry Division was alerted again. All passes were cancelled. That week we started to move out. In days to come, all of the 6th Division slowly moved out. We were trucked to a train depot where troop trains were waiting for us. We learned the trains were California bound. We were to take California-Arizona desert maneuvers. It took us several days to get to the California-Arizona desert. The desert was very hot and dusty. The desert maneuvers were to prepare us for the North African campaign. An outstanding feature of the maneuvers was the sand - in hair, food, clothes, beds, ears. It was awful. We were still there Christmas day. This holiday, we were hit by a dust storm. We couldn't see 3 feet in front of us.; very windy. We had to wear handkerchiefs on our faces. Whipped up winds so strong, that our tents had to be anchored to our trucks. Still we lost some tents. Our Christmas dinner was a bust. The sand thoroughly impregnated the turkey to spoil what would have been the most enjoyable eating we had in a long time. All we had been eating was K-rations. They were small, sealed packages which consisted of dried food - such as cheese, crackers, dried spam and sometimes, a can of soup. Many canned soups had maggots in them - very appetizing.

While away from the base camp maneuvering, we had to sleep on the ground. We had old-time, thin sleeping bags. Very uncomfortable. We always bedded down when it was dark. I picked a dandy spot. It was night time and I bedded down near a small mound of hilly sand. During the night while sleeping, something bit me on the neck. I got up quickly and saw the tail of some animal crawling into the hilly hole. The moon was bright, it helped me see the tail. In the morning, I got up with a sore, swollen neck. My entire head ached. I was driven to a hospital nearby in Yuma, Arizona. For 3 days, they filled me with shots and antibiotics. I was told that another day in the desert would have killed me. They think it was a desert lizard or a snake. Many soldiers were bitten by snakes when the snakes crawled into the sleeping bags for warmth. After 3 days, I was sent back to the desert. On the desert, there were many snakes, lizards, and scorpions. Many poisonous.

We went through the Death Valley area. Very hot. Many soldiers passed out from the heat. One day, old, grumpy, mean General Patton paid us a visit while on maneuvers. Some of the foxholes we dug he didn't like and he really yelled at the soldiers. My fox hole wasn't too good and I'm glad he didn't come near me. Many of us were disgusted with the rotten maneuvers, myself included. Many soldiers talked about abandoning and running away (AWOL). If any went AWOL, I don't know.

The California-Arizona desert maneuvers were abruptly terminated when the North African campaign, for which this desert training was obviously intended, was met with such unexpected success. The need for additional Army divisions was not needed. The troops in Africa had the Germans and Italians on the run.

In March, 1943, the 6th Star Division ended its maneuvers. We were sent to a huge army camp - Camp San Luis Obispo, California. We really needed this rest. The town San Luis Obispo was just 2 miles from camp. It is a nice city. We got many passes to visit the city.

The entire camp were of frame and tar papered huts. 6 soldiers to a hut and we finally had cots to sleep on. Here the training was tough. We had a lot of Judo training and hand to hand combat training. Many push-ups, foot races, and tough obstacles courses that had to be run with somewhat heavy combat packs and rifles on our backs.

On some passes, I spent some time at Morro-Bay and Pismo Beach. Excellent swimming.

One night, I went to see Bob Hope and other performers I can't remember. The show was at the San Luis Obispo Theater.

Early in May, the Red Star Division was on alert for overseas duty. Furloughs and leaves were given us to visit our families before we shipped out. I was given a 15 day furlough. In my case, where I had to travel a long distance - coast to coast - I think they allowed me an extra 5 days total for travel. I took a train from San Luis Obispo to Syracuse. This was not a troop train but a regular civilian train. Many civilians had to give up their train rides to soldiers. Military men had priority. I remember making train changes in San Francisco, Chicago and New York Grand Central Station. There were other train changes in between which I don't remember.

At home, we had a tearful reunion. I told them this might be the last time together because we were alerted for combat zones. Nobody knew where we were going. For safety reasons, we were not told our destination. The family had a nice party for me. My family took it very hard when I was ready to leave Syracuse, especially my mother. After a short stay at home, I was on my way back to California.

In early September, everything was set during the night. We were entrained to San Francisco. Many troop ships were waiting for the Red Star 6th Infantry Division. My outfit, the 6th Quartermaster, and their other Army outfits were crammed in the old U.S. Naval Transport SS Harry Lee. This ship was remodeled for the Army. Down below deck were many sleeping bunks. The beds were 3 feet high. It was tough sleeping in this hole. No air conditioning. Just a few fans. It was hot and stuffy. We were finally told that we were sailing to the Hawaiian Islands. It took us 6 or 7 days to reach our destination - Oahu - Hawaiian Islands. We were let on deck during the daytime hours. At night we sailed with all the lights out. Blackout was necessary because of possible enemy submarines. Of course, we had a Naval escort. We had battleships, battle cruisers, mine sweepers, airplane carriers. During the trip, the Navy blew up 3 mines floating on the water. Luckily, no ships were hit by the mines. We did spot a few enemy planes but they were at a distance and no threat to us.

Finally we landed at Pearl Harbor. Some half sunken ships were still smoking from the Japanese air attacks. The 6th Division was scattered all over the island. The Red Star Quartermaster Infantry Company was trucked to Schofield Barracks. The barracks were beautiful. All the sleeping bunks were upper beds - upper and lower. The dining rooms and the entire buildings were clean and spotless. We soon were informed that we were

here for amphibious and jungle training. The training was very tough. I remember one night, a stormy windy night, we went out to practice getting off one ship onto another. The ships were bucking and swaying. Very scary. We were on the ocean about a mile away from shore. We had to climb from one ship to another on a web-shaped rope ladder. Two men fell off while climbing the ladder, and dropped between the two ships. I don't see how they weren't crushed to death. I never did find out what happened to them. We all thought it was bad judgment to risk our lives in this stormy weather. We were all mad. I almost slipped off the ladder. There was a big stink about it. We never had that sort of training again. We still had water training. They had us get off a ship down a rope ladder to a smaller ship. (LCMs). They were personal attack boats. This was happening about 2 miles from shore. When we got off the LCMs, about 10 of them, we all rushed for shore. When we got close to the shore, the front ramp opened up and dropped out and we all rushed out for land in about 2 or 3 feet of water.

The jungle training was also tough. We had to find and kill our enemy as we walked through the dense jungle. Wooden Jap soldiers popped up in our way and we had to bayonet them. This was all observed from above cameras and we were told of our mistakes. If one didn't bayonet the proper way, a wooden arm would shoot out from the wooden Jap and punch the soldier. The arm had a boxing glove on it. It worked with a spring and it carried a good wallop. I didn't get hit. I was lucky. Many soldiers got hit in the face. I saw one soldier on the ground, his face all bloody. I tried to help him and a voice on the loudspeaker yelled at me not to touch him. He would be looked at by the medical corps. They told me to keep going on. The mosquitoes and bugs were awful and the jungle was so hot, I could hardly breathe. We had to go through many jungle obstacles. We had our Christmas dinner at Schofield Barracks mess hall. Our Christmas menu: turkey noodle soup, crackers, roast turkey, sage dressing, giblet gravy, whipped potatoes, buttered peas, scalloped corn, combination salad, mixed celery and olives, sweet mixed pickles, butterscotch pie, cookies, candy, nuts, hot Parker House rolls, butter, peach jam, peanut butter, iced tea and coffee. On weekends, we did get passes to go to Honolulu, Pearl Harbor or Waikiki Beach. One day we were told that our training was completely over- finished. **NOW WE WERE READY TO FACE THE REAL THING.** Our time in Hawaii was September to January 1944.

We were alerted again. On January 23, 1944, the entire 6th Red Star Infantry Division left Oahu for New Guinea. The soldiers occupied many troop ships. We had LST cargo ships and many other flat ships carrying trucks, tanks, ammunition, etc. The convoy was escorted and protected by Naval battle ships, battle cruisers, mine sweepers, and other ships. We also had a hospital ship with the convoy. The 6th Quartermaster Company boarded an old Dutch ship named the U.S.A.T. Sloterdijk. This was an old cargo ship remodeled into a troop ship. The food was awful. I remember one meal we had. The mess hall was below deck. There were many tables - no chairs, no seats. We had to eat standing up. During storms, the ocean was very choppy and very wavy, and every time we tried to get some food into our mouths, the ship was going up and down and it was hard to swallow. We got used to it. Anyway, one day, we had a duck dinner, mashed potatoes and other trimmings. Some of the duck meat smelled bad. I didn't eat mine. I just ate the potatoes and vegetables. Some soldiers got sick - food poisoning.

Our Naval escorts blew up many floating mines. We heard our troop ship was hit by a mine. Many casualties, many wounded were transferred to the hospital ship. Many days, many times, we were attacked by Jap zeros and bombers. I saw one Navy ship blow up and on fire. I saw many Jap planes shot down by the Navy guns.

It took us 15 days to reach New Guinea. We landed at Milne Bay. No resistance from the enemy. This island was filled with wild animals, poisonous snakes and crocodiles. I remember when I had to walk guard-duty, I could see bats flying overhead. They were called vampire bats. They had a very big wing spread. Their wing spread was at least 5 feet wide. They flew over my head but never touched me. New Guinea was occupied by head hunters and cannibals. All kinds of beautiful birds. Parrots, cockatoos, etc. The Infantry ahead of us killed many Japs. The 6th Star Engineers dug a huge hole near our camp. We soon found out why there was a huge hole. Trucks came in with dead Japs and dropped them on the ground. The bulldozers plowed them into the hole. The stink from the bodies was very bad. There were many holes dug around the islands. After the holes were half full, the bulldozer plowed the dirt over them and buried them.

One morning while on patrol with two other soldiers, we came to a native village. We saw a child not more than 2 or 3 years old bayoneted to a tree. The bayonet was stuck through his stomach. The child must have been stuck there for days because it was rotting away and smelled bad. The jungles were very hot and it doesn't take long for flesh to rot. The natives said the Nipons (Japs) did it. They were afraid to take the child down. They were afraid of the Japs. We couldn't find out why the Japs killed the child because of language differences. We took the child down and buried it. The natives had a death ceremony with singing and dancing, yelling and crying around the grave. It looked so sad.

I don't think I mentioned about crossing the Equator - the International Date Line. Somewhere before we reached New Guinea, we crossed the Equator. Everyone crossing the Equator will be initiated into the "Solemn Mysteries of the Ancient Order of the Deep". This means anyone crossing for the first time - civilians, military, everyone. The initiating included being soaked with water or even thrown in the deck swimming pool, and pies and mud thrown at them. Where they got the mud, I don't know. I got hit with some pie and mud. You couldn't escape. They got everyone on deck and locked all the escape doors. The next day we got diplomas and "Ancient Order of the Deep" cards proving our being initiated and becoming a member. I still have this diploma and card at home. If I ever should cross the Equator again, I just show my diploma or my card and I would be excused. In fact, I would be invited be one of the initiators.

In days to come, we hopped from island to island. We landed on:

Finschhafen (Fitch Haven), Hollandia on Humboldt Bays, Dutch New Guinea, Toem-Wakde (Tome?), Maffin Bay, Cape Sansapor, Cape of Golde Hoop, Sarmi, Sarong, Middleburgh, Amsterdam Islands and (some Indonesian islands).

On Sansapor Island, the 6th Engineers made us a swimming hole. A river was nearby and they diverted some river water into the hole. Everybody enjoyed the water. We always had a couple of soldiers on guard because of the many crocodiles. These crocodiles were very sneaky.

I also had the chance to fly to Sydney, Australia. The city was dead. Couldn't buy anything without a war-ration coupon. We just stayed one day. We picked up a few boxes of rifles and ammunition. There were many air attacks by the Japanese planes. My foxhole came in handy.

In September, 1944, operations on New Guinea were completed. Soon everyone and everything was being loaded on the LSTs. We were on our way to invade Luzon, Philippine Islands. Tanks, trucks, ammunition and all fire arms and machinery were loaded. We were once again escorted by Naval battle ships, battle cruisers, destroyers, mine sweepers and airplane carriers. It took us about 12-15 days on the China Sea and Coral Sea to reach Luzon waters. We were attacked every day by Japanese planes. On our 2nd day, we were attacked by about 15 Japanese bombers and zeroes. I saw many planes shot down by our Navy. The soldiers, including myself, were lined up along the railing with rifles in case enemy planes came too close to us. I think the Navy escorts shot down all the planes. We did have casualties. 2 Naval ships were hit by bombs and 2 LSTs were hit. There were some deaths. Some of the damage to our convoy was done by Japanese planes committing suicide. They dove down straight at their target. I saw some of our ships burning. Only one plane came close to our LST. He dropped a couple of bombs about 20-25 yards away from us. We fired our rifles at them. He didn't get far. The Navy blew the plane to bits. A big fireball. Every day, we faced enemy attacks.

When we did reach Luzon waters, we didn't land for a while. We kind of circled around for 2 days and 2 nights while the Navy ships shelled the island. It was a scary sight seeing the island being shelled. It was a continuous shelling. On the 3rd day, the soldiers were alerted to get ready to hit the island. We were to invade the Lingayen Gulf area. All LSTs dropped their smaller LCM boats into the water. On our signal, all men on all LSTs climbed overboard on rope ladders onto the LCMs. It was a sight, seeing all invasion boats racing to shore. Jap planes over us. I saw a couple of LCMs get hit by the planes. The boats and men just blew up. The Navy and the Air Corps did a good job shooting down the planes. I saw US planes in a dog fight in the movies but this was the real thing. When we got close to the shore, the front ramps opened up and dropped, and we rushed for land. The boats did not go all the way on land. They dropped us off about 50 yards from land. We had to wade through about 2 feet of water. Some soldiers never made it to shore. On land, we didn't get much enemy resistance. Mostly sniper fire from the edge of the jungle. We had to dig foxholes as soon as we got on land.

I started to dig my foxhole when a Jap zero came down on us. This might be the closest I came to death. The plane came right over me. I dropped flat on the ground. The plane came so close, I felt the wind as it flew by. I don't know why he didn't use his machine guns. Maybe his guns got jammed. I don't know. He didn't get far. As soon as he flew

by, I watched as his plane was shot down. He crashed down in a ball of fire. We stayed in our holes for about a half hour while our planes and ground guns were wiping out the enemy planes. Soon we got the signal that it was safe to leave our holes which were like ovens. Very hot. A few minutes later, the Filipino civilians were coming out of the jungle to greet us. I don't know how they survived the shelling of the island. They were glad to see us. Many of them were crying and gave us bread and fruit and wine. One old man came up to me, crying and hugged me. Most of the people spoke good English. The old man said, "Free at last. What took you so long?" He put a religious necklace around my neck and said, "God bless you". The chain was kind of heavy and shiny. It might have been gold. The sad part is while moving inward into the jungle, I lost the necklace. I didn't wear it on my neck because it was a little heavy and I already had dog tags around my neck. Dog tags in case you don't know, are two aluminum identification tags. In case of my death, they would know my identity. I kept the necklace in my pocket and it somehow slipped out.

We went from town to town and after about 3 days, we were finally stationed at Rosario, Philippines, a fairly large town. There we stayed a couple of weeks. Except for a few enemy snipers, the town was free of Japs. Not completely free, because the enemy still sneaked into town and raised hell. Soldiers were killed. My company, the 6th QM, was set up in a large empty warehouse. They even gave us cots. Unbelievable. One day there was a lot of noise at a school near the warehouse. Thinking the Japs had infiltrated, we grabbed our rifles and rushed to the warehouse. The 6th Signal Company and the 6th Ordnance Company, who were also stationed near the school house, also rushed the school house. The school children looked scared. We were told a child misbehaved and the teacher put him in a closet to punish him. The child in the closet was screaming. After a while, the child was quiet, and the teacher thought that he was punished enough, so she opened the door to free him. The child was gone. The teacher told us he was 4 years old. The closet had a large hole in the wall leading to the outdoors. Thinking the boy went out through the hole, we all went out back. There we saw a python about 14 feet long crawling away. He couldn't move very fast because of a large lump in his body. A 6th Ordnance soldier had a machete and he hacked the python around the lump. And there was the boy, crushed to death. He was a small child. I had to turn my head away. I felt sick. The teacher picked him up and put him in a burlap bag and took him away. I heard that pythons can swallow fairly big pigs. I later found out that there were other times where children were swallowed by pythons. There was one case just like ours in the school room on this island.

I almost forgot. While we were still in Lingayen Gulf, Mr. Big Shot himself, General MacArthur, came ashore. His small boat took him on land. He never got his feet wet. The U.S. Press was there. He used an LCM to get back on the water again, while the Press was taking movies of him. The LCM ramp dropped and here comes General MacArthur, wading through the water, coming to shore, getting his feet wet. The big Phony Baloney!

While still in Rosario, we still took turns to patrol the outskirts of the town. The enemy was still around us. One day it was my turn. I went out patrolling with 2 other soldiers.

We saw a few dead smelly Jap soldiers. One was dead, lying face down in a stream of water running down the field. We pulled him out because this stream might be a source of water supply for some people. Another was lying face up along the stream with his mouth wide open. His mouth was filled with gold teeth. One soldier named Tom knocked out the gold teeth with the butt of his rifle. He took the teeth. He said the teeth were valuable and the dead Jap wouldn't miss them. I was so mad, I told him to keep the hell away from me. He just laughed - the jerk. I hated what he did.

We were told to bring back prisoners if we ran into Jap soldiers. We came upon 3 enemy soldiers, trying to hide behind a big bush. We got them out and they raised their hands in surrender. One Jap had a deep gash in his leg. His leg looked bad. It looked like infection set in. He couldn't walk. He was a small soldier. He weighed less than 100 lbs. They made motions that they were very hungry. They probably didn't eat in days. Going back to camp, we marched them ahead of us, but the cripple couldn't walk, so we took turns carrying him. We were still a couple of miles away from camp. It was a hot day and the cripple really smelled bad. When we walked about halfway to camp, the jerk who was carrying him at the time, dropped him and said to hell with him. He told us to go ahead and he would catch up to us. He soon caught up to us minus the cripple. I asked him what happened to the cripple and he said the Jap wouldn't bother anyone anymore. That's when I snapped and hit him in the mouth and knocked him down. He wasn't even mad at me for attacking him. He just laughed. The other soldier pulled me away from him. He pulled out the gold teeth from his pocket and was rattling them, laughing. The U.S. Army had many mean bad jerks.

One night, while asleep, we were awakened by the captain. He said there were Jap soldiers in the church across from us. The church had to be at least 100 yards from us. We got up, about 10 of us, got dressed and went after them. Between the warehouse and the church, there was a cemetery. We had to crawl on our stomachs over the graves because the moon was bright and we didn't want to be caught crawling over. At night, the cemetery rats always came out. The cemetery was loaded with rats. I saw that some of the rats were as big as cats. Three men got bit by them. I had a couple crawl over the back of my legs. When we got to the church, it was empty. If the enemy was there, they were gone now.

I got friendly with one family in Rosario. They were nice people. They spoke good English. They were a couple of people in their late 30's or early 40's. They had two children. One child was 5 years old and the other about 7 years old. They didn't live in a regular house. They lived in what you may call a bamboo shack. It was just one big room which was their kitchen, bedroom, living room and bathroom. No beds. They slept on the floor. They had mattresses made up with dried grass and other things. No chairs. They sat on the floor. They had a big table in the center of the room. They ate at the table, sitting or kneeling on the floor. The house was on high stilts. The house was at least 5 feet off the ground. To get in or out, they had to use a ladder. Underneath the house, they had a big wooden barrel. Their toilet was a hole in the floor and all their urine and human waste went down into the wooden barrel. Every couple of days, they

would empty it into their garden. It was their fertilizer. They had a garden with many vegetables.

They invited me to dinner a few times. The food was tasty. I didn't dare ask what the meat was. It didn't taste like most meat. It had a sweet stringy taste. For all I know, it could have been those nice fat juicy cemetery rats. I used to sneak some crackers and canned food and give it to them. They were so grateful. One day I brought them about 10 cans of food and they cried thanking me. Yes, I stole those cans from a huge stockpile of cans in a QM warehouse. If caught, I would have been in trouble. When we were about to move on, they hugged me and said I was family to them. They were poor. The lady gave me 2 handmade handkerchiefs. I still have them in the house somewhere.

While on one of my patrols, I took a sword off of a dead Jap. It was a beautiful sword. It had a couple of diamonds on its hilt. Before we moved out for Manila, the Army took all our souvenirs, such as Jap pistols, swords, and many other things. They tagged them and said we would get them back after the war. After the war, I got a sword back, but not my sword. I complained, but they told me, take it or leave it. My tag was on the sword. I got some other beat up thing. I still believe some officer stole my sword.

Our next stop was Manila. During the Japanese occupation, they printed their own money. Now, their paper money was worthless. The paper money was all over the Manila streets. I picked up a few as momentos. I still have them somewhere. The Japs were driven out of Manila and all the stores and meat markets were open again. I saw an ugly sight at the meat market. They had dead cats and dogs hanging on meat hooks. The meat was for sale. In fact, I did have dog meat for dinner in Pearl Harbor, Hawaiian Islands. I ordered steak in a restaurant and I got dog meat. It tasted tough and somewhat sweet. Of course, I didn't know it was dog meat. I never again went to any Hawaiian restaurants. We still had to look out for Japanese snipers in Manila.

While in Manila for a couple of weeks, a Ranger Battalion wanted 7 QM soldiers just on loan for a short while. Two of us volunteered, myself included, five others were picked. I think it was the 7th Ranger Battalion, I'm not sure. We had to take tough Ranger training. One tough obstacle course was a rope bridge spanned across a river. The bridge was about 15 feet high over the water. We had to walk on a swaying rope bridge. About halfway across, there was an opening. At the opening, we had to jump down into the water. Two men refused to walk the bridge and were sent back to the 6th QM Company. After about a week and a half, six men were picked, myself included to sneak into Battan. There was supposed to be a prisoner of war camp on the island. We were to free them. After struggling through a rough jungle, we reached the prison camp. It was empty. Rats were running all over the camp. The prisoners were moved out before we got there. The prison camp was filthy and it smelled. We had to return back to the Ranger camp.

A few days later, the remaining five QM men, were asked to be permanent Rangers. One accepted, and four of us, including myself, refused the offer. Staying here meant

that there was a good chance that we'd be killed. I hated the Rangers. Too rough and tough.

It was in August that we heard that Japan had surrendered. The war was over. Soon the 6th Division Command Office was preparing to send the soldiers back home to the U.S.A. The ones with the most points got to go home first. The point system was amassed by the soldier's age, time in military service, time served overseas. Family men had to wait their turn. It was about 2 weeks when I was notified about my orders to go home. The catch was that it was hard to get transportation back to the U.S.A.. I and the other soldiers were offered high ranking sergeant promotions if we stayed and signed up for further duty. I was a corporal at that time. Some men accepted the offer. I refused the offer. I had enough of Army life. The 6th Infantry Division got orders to occupy Korea. I had a choice to stay in Manila and wait for transportation or go to Korea with the 6th Quartermaster Company. My chances here in Manila were very poor of getting transportation at any time soon. My chances were better in Korea.

I went to Korea. It was winter there, very cold and snow on the ground. We had no hot water and had to wash in cold water. During my stay there in Korea, I had a chance to visit the city of Seoul. A very dirty city. Crime in that city was up. I did not like Korea. A few days later, I got transportation on a battle cruiser. I don't remember the name of the battle cruiser. It was sailing directly to the U.S.A. and had room for about fifty soldiers. The soldiers had two beds to sleep on. We had to sleep on the hard floors. I slept mostly on deck. It was a little stuffy below deck. On rainy nights, I slept below deck on the floor. I saw a couple of rats run by me as I was lying on the floor. They never bothered me. When we got about halfway home, the Navy was ordered to get rid of all of its ammunition. For hours, they discharged their shells, machine guns and all the other gun ammunition. A lot of noise. The cruiser swayed back and forth every time they discharged a heavy shell. A sailor gave me some cotton for my ears. The cotton helped a lot. We sailed by the Hawaiian Islands. Never stopped.

After days on water, we finally reached the New York docking point. They trucked us to Fort Dix, New Jersey. At Fort Dix, I got a chance to call home. Everyone at home was screaming with joy!

After our debriefing, a final physical, we got our Honorable Discharge. We had reservations for the train ride home. The soldiers scattered for different locations. Myself, I was heading for Syracuse. We were truck driven to Grand Central Station. In a few minutes, I was on my way home.

*We were now civilians, so we had to buy our own food. We were given some discharge money at Fort Dix. I think we made a couple of stops. At each stop, I had a chance to call home. The train was scheduled to arrive in Syracuse at 12:30 a.m. My family said they would be waiting for me at the train station. The train arrived in Syracuse a few minutes after 12:30 a.m. I was welcomed by Sam Sgarlata and my sisters, Stella and Virginia. Sam took my clumsy duffel bag and threw it in the trunk of his car. A duffel bag is a canvas bag about 3 feet high. In the bag, the military government gave me an extra

pair of pants, 2 shirts (summer and winter), jacket, underwear, socks, shoes, overcoat, hat, my sword and other things such as shaving cream, toothpaste, all the soap we wanted and other personal things. All the clothes were Army issues. No civilian clothes. Anyway, it was big and full, and I had to struggle with it all the way from Fort Dix.

As we were walking out of the Syracuse train station, the few people waiting at the station started applauding. I asked Sam why the applause and Sam said the applauding was for me. I was embarrassed. I didn't like it. When I got home, everyone was up to greet me. We had a tearful reunion and celebration.

I didn't go back to work for about 6 months. Just resting. I received a military government check once a month for about 5 months. I don't remember how much. It was some sort of a law that was passed to help out the veterans until they went back to work. My last place of employment, the Eckel-Nye Steel Company on Emerson Ave., was shut down. I was without a job. During war time, the steel company didn't want to convert to war materials so they were forced to shut down.

After my rest, I got a job at the Solvay Process Co. People kept telling me to quit. They said the poisons and chemicals would kill me. The job paid good money. The Solvay Process Co. was one of the better paying in the county. Well, I worked there for 34 years and I have been retired for 20 years and I'm still alive. After I worked there for about 6 or 7 years, I was offered a foreman's job. I refused the offer. The reason: too much responsibility. The foreman has no union to back him up. He could be fired at any time. I've seen these firings. Staying at my job, I had union backing. The company cannot fire a union member unless for a good reason. Anyway, I had a good job, a good paying job, as a 1st class operator in many departments. I was a 1st class relief operator, knowing all the sections' jobs. I operated at the sodium nitrate, potash, ammonium chloride and caustic sections.

My sisters fixed me up with a few dates. But all the girls I dated were not for me. And through my sister, Virginia, I met a girl named Helen Krajewski. She worked at a dry cleaners company. We got along pretty good. We got married on September 19, 1946. No big wedding. Her parents were poor and so were my parents. So, just one day, we got married at Sacred Heart Church. No fanfare, no reception. After our daughter, Christine, was born, she quit her job to take care of Christine and take care of all the house duties. I made enough money, so there was no shortage of money.

I retired from Allied Signal (Solvay Process) in 1981. I had 34 years of service and I got a pretty good pension. Usually the pensioners lived up to 10 years and some died after just a few short years. The company saved money. Once the pensioner died, his pension also died. The men who lived long, like myself, for 20 years, they don't like very much because they are still paying my pension.

We made a few trips to the National Shrine of Czestochowa. The shrine is in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. On one of our trips to the shrine, we had some trouble. This certain visit, we parked at the shrine's parking lot and a crazy black man ran up to us -

yelling and cursing at us. No one was around. The Mass was being celebrated at the church and all the people were at the Mass. He said some crazy things like he didn't like us and he was going to teach us a lesson. He called us all kinds of nasty names. His age was around 30 or 40 years old. My wife, Helen, was very scared and crying. She told him to leave us alone and this was sacred grounds. He turned on her. He pulled out a hunting knife and said to her, "I got enough of your lip. I'm going to shut your mouth". I JUST SNAPPED! I grabbed him from behind and got him on the ground. I straddled him and with both fists, I hit him in the face. I was taught Judo in the Army and that's why I got him on the ground so easily. Helen was grabbing me from behind yelling at me to let him go before I killed him. His face was bloodied up pretty bad and he was yelling, "You broke my nose! You broke my nose!" He got up and said he would get me for beating him up. I went after him again and Helen grabbed my arm, holding me back. He ran down the road, shaking his fists at me and yelling he would get me. Helen was very upset, shaking and crying. She wanted to go home right away. She was scared he would return. I wore a white shirt and it was badly bloodied up. We always took some extra clothes just in case they were needed. There was a washroom nearby and I cleaned up and changed my shirt and trousers. I scraped my knuckles and scraped the blood off of them. I finally got Helen calmed down. And I told her no black bastard was going to drive me away. So we finished the Mass in the church. The hunting knife somehow got knocked away from him in the scuffle. I still have the knife around the garage somewhere. Helen made me promise not to tell anyone what happened at the shrine. We never went back there again. Helen never wanted to go to Pennsylvania again.

During the rest of my retired life, I had health problems. In 1989, I had a stroke. It affected my vision, especially my left eye. I was almost blind in my left eye. I had to wear an eyepatch for a few weeks. Even today, I still have problems with my speech. Sometimes, I still have trouble trying to fit in the right words in my sentence.

I also had a serious stomach bleeding ulcer in 1991. All day, I was throwing up blood. I was very weak. Finally, Helen (Christine), over my objections, called the ambulance. I was so weak, I couldn't move. This bleeding ulcer almost killed me. In fact, while in the ambulance, just before everything went black, I heard the ambulance attendants telling the hospital that they were losing me. I'll never forget the strange feeling. I was floating through the sky at a fast speed. I was going thru clouds. The clouds were made of small clouds the size of cotton balls. Then all of a sudden, my flight was stopped. It was like something braked me. I started to fall back at a fast speed. Soon I opened my eyes and I was still in the ambulance. The attendant said, "Good! We got you back!" I found out later that I really did die for a few seconds.

While they were wheeling me in the hospital, I had another throwing up of blood. They rushed me to an emergency room. They shoved a scanner down my throat. They gave me no novocaine, no pain killers. They just shoved that scanning tube down my throat. I thought they were going to kill me. While wheeling me into the emergency room, I threw up a lot of blood again. Anyway, the scanner found the bleeding ulcer, but the ulcer was

no longer bleeding. It sealed itself. I stayed 12 miserable days in the hospital. During my stay, I had 2 blood transfusions. Today I still have health problems.

Remember a bit earlier, I mentioned Lena Davia? After being in the hospital about 3 days, a couple of older nurses came into the room. They didn't go to my sick roommate but came directly to me. One nurse kind of looked familiar to me. They stayed over an hour. It's funny I never asked for their names. The patients always called the nurses plain "nurse" and not by their given names. I was very comfortable talking to them. They called themselves a couple of old maids and laughed about it. I had a heavy beard and I mentioned I wished I had a razor. This certain nurse went out and came back about 5 minutes later with a razor. She offered to shave my face if I was too weak to shave myself. I thanked her and told her I would shave myself. I got up and went to the washroom which had a big mirror. This nurse stayed behind me while I was shaving and asked a lot about my life. After I got in bed, I happened to say I had a craving for a candy bar. She got up and left the room for about 10 minutes. When she came back, she had a Mars candy bar. She cut it into 3 pieces and we shared the candy bar. She said I could only have a little piece. I enjoyed her company. Soon they left. This certain nurse, as they were leaving, called me Marty. I got to thinking how did she know my name? Then I thought that she might have gotten my name at the desk.

The next morning, this special nurse came alone. She brought me some flowers and set them on the table. She also brought me a newspaper and a couple of sports magazines. She stayed about an hour. I never was comfortable with strangers but for some strange reason, I was very much at ease with her. We talked about many things and I thought she was a very nice nurse. I thought it was nice of her to visit me. Before she left, she kissed me on the forehead and said, "Goodbye and God bless you". I was puzzled. Why did she do such a thing? Nurses don't kiss patients. I never saw her again.

After not seeing her for a couple of days, I asked the regular nurse what happened to the older nurses. She said the nurses were just visitors and not attached to this hospital. They were nurses from Crouse-Irving Hospital. And then she said, "What did you do to this certain nurse? She was leaving crying." The regular nurse stopped her and asked her what was wrong. This certain nurse told her nothing was wrong, it was just one more of her crying spells. Then the regular nurse was paged to go to another room. I tried to think what I said to her that was so bad. I couldn't think of anything bad being said to her. I'm not the kind of person to insult or say bad things to a person. Maybe behind a person's back, I might mouth about them but never to their face. I soon forgot about the entire happening. Soon, I was discharged from the hospital, hoping never again to be a patient.

It wasn't until December, 1999 that everything came into place. In 1999, Lena Davia made the obituary column in the newspapers. Lena Davia - dead at 81. Slowly, everything came back to me. That certain nurse in the hospital was Lena Davia. Now I know why she looked so familiar to me. It was Lena Davia for sure - just an older Lena Davia. She was on my mind for days. A lot of unanswered questions. I felt so bad I

didn't recognize her. Even though I didn't recognize her, I feel she should have told me who she was. Why she didn't tell me who she was, I don't know. I guess I'll never know. Maybe I should have attended her wake but I was sick myself that day. Dizzy spells and weakness.

I've had other hospital connections, being a patient again. In St. Joseph's Hospital, I had a catheterization done on my arteries. The procedure was not very pleasant. Three arteries needed attention. One artery was only slightly plugged. One was completely plugged solid and the doctors said they couldn't unplug it. Too dangerous. Another one was 95% plugged. I had my choice of angioplasty or something new called atherectomy. With angioplasty, many people had to return to the hospital to have it done again because the arteries started to plug up again. But, with atherectomy, they scraped the inner artery with an instrument similar to a roto-rooter. They scraped off about 90% and left about 5% plugged. They didn't want to scrape too close because the instrument might have cut the artery and I'd be in big trouble.

I also had a stroke. My entire side was kind of numb for weeks. I lost some sight in my left eye. I had to wear a patch on my left eye for days. I did have minor trouble with my speech. Even today, I still have some trouble with my speech. Sometimes I have trouble putting the right word in a sentence.

My Family

In June, 2000 my sister Charlotte died. That made me the last link in the chain of the old Klik family. My daughter Christine is the new link in the chain.

My father was the first link to break the chain. He died when I was 2 or 3 years old. The cause of his death was not clear. I guess in those days, the doctors were mostly guessing. He either died from cancer or a heart attack.

Charlotte was in bad shape for years, at least 8 years of her life. She was in an auto accident. She was banged up pretty bad. She had internal injuries. Her chest was somewhat damaged. Also her vocal chords were damaged. Since the accident, she could not talk above a whisper. The last 2 years of her life, she was on a respirator machine. She had the machine running 24 hours a day. She finally died in a Cortland hospital. That left me as the only old Klik left.

My sister, Stella, was next to die. She died of breast cancer.

My sister, Virginia, died of a blood clot. They messed her up in the hospital. They first were treating her for heart trouble. The real cause of her death was a blood clot from her foot to her brain. She was in an auto accident and had a broken foot. A few days after the cast was taken off her foot, I guess the blood clot let loose and traveled to her brain.

My mother also died of a heart attack.

My stepfather died of a possible heart attack. He was sick for many years.

My half-brother, Joe, died of a heart attack. He died while at work at the Solvay Process Company. He was on midnight shift. He might have been lying on the floor a long time. That's the trouble with working midnight shifts. On midnight shifts, I'd only see a foreman once the first hour then the last hour, when he got his final readings. Anybody could have gotten sick with nobody around. The union never complained about one man working in a building alone. I remember one midnight shift working all alone in the potash building. I had to operate a 6 story building on my own. The 3rd floor had large iron presses which filtered potash liquor. While tightening the presses with an iron bar, I slipped and I hit my head on the iron press. It knocked me out cold. I was lying on the floor for a few minutes. Nobody around. When I got up, it was almost quitting time. I quit a little earlier, excused by the office to go to the company infirmary. The doctor said I had a slight concussion. I had two days off with pay.

Things I Forgot

I hope I won't be repeating myself in the coming events.

I don't believe I mentioned the monkey I had in the Philippines. One day I just picked a few bananas at the edge of a jungle. I sat down on a log, peeled the banana, and started eating it. A monkey started towards me and stopped about 15 feet in front of me. He was a young monkey, probably lost his mother. He stood looking at me and I tried to coax him to come closer with a peeled banana. He started to inch himself closer to me. Finally, he was right at my feet, looking up at me. Then he jumped on my knee and took the banana from my hand and started eating it. When I tried to pet him, he was ready to bite me. After a few minutes, I was able to pet him on the head and touch him. Since then, he was always close to me. The other soldiers couldn't believe the monkey's friendship towards me. At that time, we lived in a tent, six men to a tent. He slept at the bottom of my bed every night. On time, he jumped on top of my bed and I yelled at him not to do it anymore. He looked at me, screeching. But, he never jumped on my bed again. If I was sitting on my cot, he would jump on my cot, he would jump on my lap or on my shoulders. The soldiers called him a garbage eliminator. He would eat everything thrown at him. He was with me for at least a couple of months, until we got orders to leave the Philippines. I had to give him to another soldier who stayed behind.

I don't remember if I mentioned a parrot at Fort Leonard Wood. He belonged to a soldier who taught him to speak. He always sat on the roof of the mess hall, our eating building. He kept saying "Cooking stinks! Bad food! Bad food!" He kept repeating these insults to our cooks. His voice was carried all over the camp. The cooks sometimes came out and threw potatoes at him.

